

WOMAN RUM PILOT TELLS EXPERIENCES

Willie Carter Sharpe Averaged Taking 100 Gallons Day From Franklin County, Virginia

ROANOKE, Va., May 24. (AP)—Almost shy in a well-filled courtroom, a woman who piloted roaring automobiles at dizzy speeds behind or before liquor caravans along the road from Franklin county to Roanoke in the hey-day of prohibition began to unravel part of her life here yesterday afternoon.

Minus a diamond that used to glitter in her teeth, hands that shifted high-speed gears folded in her lap, Willie Carter Sharpe, formerly of Roanoke and probably the best-known "pilot" in Virginia's bootlegging history—reputed not only because she was a woman but also because she piloted nearly 200,000 gallons of whiskey from the Franklin hills, perhaps more than any man—became witness No. 165 for the government in the prosecution of alleged Franklin county liquor conspirators.

Unwinding the skein of her story tangled in liquor cans, she named 20 rum-runners for whom she piloted at intervals; named those for whom they worked, including a defendant, Jack Bess, of Roanoke, and disclosed whiskey sources. On the stand for only a half-hour prior to adjournment, the Floyd county girl who stepped from the five-and-ten cent store into a marriage with a Roanoke bootlegger's son and drink-selling, will continue her story this morning.

Meanwhile J. C. Edwards, of Chatham, and P. A. Murphy, former Pittsylvania county state prohibition inspectors, testified that when C. C. Lee, indicted commonwealth's attorney, requested their temporary transfer to Franklin, they made arrests but found small quantities of whiskey.

Edwards' opinion was that Lee confronted an "almost impossible task," with respect to illicit distilling. He said "you could catch the stills but you couldn't catch the men."

Raided With Franklin Officers

Both said they raided in 1932 with Franklin officers when the late Attorney General Sanders ordered them at Lee's request, and Murphy said that after a fruitless raid at a filling station of T. Roosevelt Smith, defendant, "the statement was made that they knew we was coming." He said the "statement" was not amplified.

Edwards said that Lee told him they could raid anywhere at any time, but that they were "specially to look after the east side" of the county (the Glade Hill-Union Hall area). Among other places raided was the Blackwater filling station, he said—the same station at which she occasionally met liquor caravans, the woman liquor pilot said later. Edwards said the raid there netted only some pure grain alcohol.

Murphy and Edwards said that when they arrested Leonard L. Fralin, who pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge April 22, and carried him before Lee, procedure was unlike that in other counties. Both said they chased Fralin's automobile, caught it on a by-road, found 20 gallons of whiskey in it, captured Fralin and took him to Rocky Mount. Fralin was "turned loose" without bond after he paid a fine, Edwards said, and Murphy said his car was released "the same day," and Fralin drove it home.

Neither was called before the grand jury to testify.

In Pittsylvania, Patrick and Henry counties, Edwards said, officers were called to testify in "transporting" cases. Lee's counsel read a court order fining Fralin for "possession."

From selling drinks with the Carters to hauling and then piloting were the stepping-stones in Willie Carter Sharpe's career, she said. She married Floyd Carter, son of the late John Carter, and divorced him in 1925. But she had already started hauling whiskey, from Floyd county.

"I commenced piloting whiskey then from Franklin county," she said—from 1926 until July, 1931, working "regularly" with Charlie Sharpe, Roanoker and alleged co-conspirator. The woman also is an alleged co-conspirator. Sharpe testified recently that he married into the Nicholson family in Franklin and that "Willie Carter—no Sharpe," had piloted him on a few runs.

The woman said yesterday that she piloted at least 110 gallons of liquor a day, with Sharpe receiving \$20 a load from Jack Bess.

Working in St. Louis, Mo., she returned here at the start of the trial a month ago Wednesday. A diamond filling in her teeth was extracted a few days ago.